



Achieve Hartford!

A Compact for Education Excellence

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Jim Starr – Testimony Submitted 4-6-11 – General Assembly Committee on Appropriations

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for your committee. My name is Jim Starr and I am the Executive Director of Achieve Hartford!

Achieve Hartford! is an independent nonprofit organization established to monitor, support and be a catalyst for education reform and community involvement in the Hartford Public School District. We recognize – and direct our efforts toward – the moral and economic imperatives of school improvement in Connecticut's capital city. Our unyielding focus is on the students.

This is why we wanted to address the omission in Bill 5117 and Senate bill 1121 of maintaining minimum municipal education aid. Such bills, as appropriate, need to include impacts from changes, if made, to the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR). Provisions of House Bill 6385, which do address the MBR issue, would permit a municipality to reduce funding to its school district by \$3,000 per resident student if the enrollment is lower than that of the previous year.

While we philosophically support improving the provisions of the MBR – and, indeed, a per student formula should be considered – we think this should not be done in a vacuum, separate and apart from the major review and evaluation of the ECS funding formula now being called for by the Governor, with a separate study group.

There is growing consensus that we need to fundamentally fix how we fund our schools – and the Governor's call for a review is indeed appropriate. Our concern is that, by taking a piecemeal approach to addressing the much larger school funding problem – as in the case of these proposed MBR changes – the solution to adequate, fair, and appropriate education funding is not being addressed in the thoughtful and comprehensive manner required.

This is borne out even more in districts that operate with students of the highest need and whose cities are facing the most difficult financial challenges. Hartford is such a city – and its public school students would be the most impacted.

The Hartford Public School District receives only approximately one-third of its general operating budget from the City – and overall has been systemically underfunded to meet the needs of an under-performing district. Thankfully, the ECS allocation has been budgeted to be flat this upcoming year. However, other reductions not considered as part of a cohesive funding solution only exacerbates existing budgetary and educational challenges.

Our point is, we have a fundamentally broken system for funding education in our state. We need to fix that system first, not use stopgap or piecemeal measures that may negatively impact students as a broader-based solution is being sought as part of the Governor's recommendations.

In the context of improving how education is funded in the state of Connecticut – and ultimately its municipalities, the proposed MBR changes simply put the cart before the horse. The MBR changes as contemplated within Bill 6385 are arbitrary and not part of an integrated solution that is necessary.

Thank you for allowing me to testify.

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